

Helping Hand

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Communication: The Anti-Drug

As children grow older, they face many temptations, including drugs. According to a study conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, while a huge majority of parents claim they have spoken to their children about drugs, a surprisingly small 27 percent of teen-agers say they are learning about the risks of drug use at home.

Drug use is not an issue a parent can handle by just having “the talk.” When it comes to dangerous activities such as drug use, an ongoing discussion is necessary. This can be difficult, considering the numerous demands of work, school, after-school activities and religious and social commitments. However, the more time a parent takes to communicate with his child about drugs and other sensitive subjects now, the more at ease the child will be about asking future questions or for advice.

The following suggestions can help parents become more effective communicators, according to behavioral scientist Tony Biglan, PhD:

- **Be a better listener.**
Ask questions and be willing to listen to what the child has to say. Paraphrase answers to make sure their meaning is understood.
- **Give honest answers.**
Do not make up what you do not know. If a child asks you something and the answer is unknown, offer to find out. Better yet, make it a project to find the answer together.
- **Do not react in a way that will bring an end to further discussion.**
This can be a challenge. If a child makes shocking statements or statements that are counter to family beliefs, calmly discuss why the child thinks the way he or she does. A negative reaction to one subject may make the child apprehensive to future discussions about other difficult topics.
- **Tell your children they are loved.**
This is the most important thing a parent can do.



From Passenger to Driver

Sweet 16. How ironic that the age children eagerly anticipate is the age that parents dread. The freedom that teens expect to spring them into adulthood relies on an exciting milestone: obtaining a permit to drive. For parents, that dreaded threshold can seem the doorway to fear, anxiety and losing control.

Statistics show that 82 percent of fatal crashes involving 16 year old drivers are due to driving errors, not speeding or drinking. Teen drivers simply lack the experience and maturity that build skill and good judgment. But remember that the process of learning to handle a vehicle starts well before the legal age to obtain a license. Children spend 16 years as passengers, so parents can use much of that time as a learning experience. Here's how:

Prepare: Help your child be observant about the driving process by pointing out incidents as they occur, asking opinions, suggesting solutions, giving tips on decisions and car care.

Set an example: Let your child see you as a confident, considerate, defensive driver. Teens “rehearse” adult behavior, so be sure what your child sees is calm and thoughtful.

Be informed: Many states are converting to a graduated licensing program in which new drivers are required to pass through several stages of driving regulations, but most states now require very little before a driver's test can be attempted. Check out the available programs and pay for a good driving school if possible (Added bonus: a discount on insurance premiums!).

Set guidelines: Don't just go by minimum state guidelines, especially if your area has poor or no driver's education available. Design a program that suits your family by:

setting limits—such as no driving after dark, two passenger limit
enforcing rules—such as seat belts at all times, no drug or alcohol use
requiring milestones—such as 10 hours with a parent as passenger,
three months before passing to the next stage

If guidelines are broken, take away the keys.

Practice: Give yourself plenty of opportunities to observe the novice driver by allowing your teen to do the driving on family errands, vacations, etc. Start easy, but include many different driving situations, such as parking, merging and stopping.

Trust: Let your teen know that you are trusting him or her to be safe and make good decisions. The more secure your teen feels with you, the more secure you can feel about their driving.

Put in the extra time and effort. Your child and others on the roads will be safer, and it will be easier for you to let him or her go.



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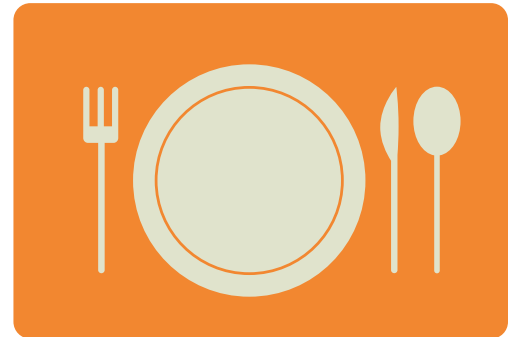
Family Meals

For many families, eating dinner together has become a lost art—but it proves to be a simple, effective way to reduce the risk of youth substance abuse and to raise healthier children. Before family dinners go the way of the dinosaur, make the effort to preserve family mealtime.

The facts are on the table; eating dinner together keeps communication open. It's the perfect time and place to reconnect and show your kids that they are your number 1 priority. It can help you direct your children toward positive activities and behavior, reducing the likelihood that they will get involved with alcohol, tobacco, and/or illegal drugs.

Why are family mealtimes important?

By eating with your children, it is more likely that meals will be healthier and more balanced. Compared to teens that have frequent family dinners, those who rarely have family dinners are three and a half times more likely to have abused prescription drugs or an illegal drug other than marijuana. Girls who have five or more meals a week with their families are one-third less likely to develop unhealthy eating habits.



WHAT SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT?

- Ask everyone to share his or her favorite part or biggest challenge of the day. Plan and then let the children pick tasks for the next day's menu.
- Exchange memories about your favorite family pastimes.
- Discuss an activity the family can do together and then put it on the calendar.
- Talk with your children about a book they are reading or a movie they have seen.
- Ask the children about their classes, homework, teachers, and upcoming assignments.

Preventing Your Child from Smoking

Talking with children about the dangers of smoking can help prevent them from smoking, but it is difficult for kids to relate to diseases that may not occur until middle and late adulthood. So what can a parent do?

Here are some factors proven to decrease nicotine use among teens:

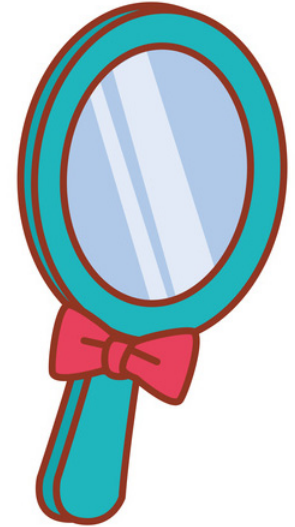
- Increased parental presence in the home
- Teens with high levels of "connectedness" to their parents
- Teens that reported a greater number of shared activities with their parents
- Personal importance placed upon religion and prayer
- High self-esteem - high levels of feeling "connected" at school



Body Image and Children

“On a diet, you can’t eat.” This is what one 5-year-old girl said in a study on girls’ ideas about dieting. Children pick up on comments about dieting concepts that may seem harmless, such as limiting high-fat foods or eating less. Yet, as girls enter their teen years, having ideas about dieting can lead to problems. Adults can take steps to help children develop a positive body image and relate to food in a healthy way:

- Make sure children understand that weight gain is a normal part of development, especially during puberty.
- Avoid negative statements about food, weight, and body size and shape.
- Allow your child to make decisions about food, while making sure that plenty of healthy and nutritious meals and snacks are available.
- Compliment children on her or his efforts, talents, accomplishments, and personal values.
- Restrict television viewing, watch television with your child, and discuss the media images you see.
- Encourage your school to enact policies against size and sexual discrimination, harassment, teasing, and name-calling; support the elimination of public weigh-ins and fat measurements.
- Keep the communication lines open with your child.



The Truth About Bullies

With school back in session, students of every age are learning more than math and science and history. They’re learning every day about their classmates, and about community. And one thing they will have noticed is that nearly every school has its share of bullies who perpetrate physical and emotional violence toward others.

The toll of bullying on a victim can be lifelong injury to that person’s self-esteem and ability to trust. Here’s a short list of what every victim of bullying should know:

- **Bullies hurt others because they can’t deal with their own emotions, including fear.**
That’s why so many bullies flee when confronted.
- If a bully targets you, it isn’t because you’re a weak person.
It’s likely you have strengths the bully envies.
- Being bullied can make you feel isolated.
But the key to stopping it is putting a team together. Don’t go it alone.

For more information, contact: